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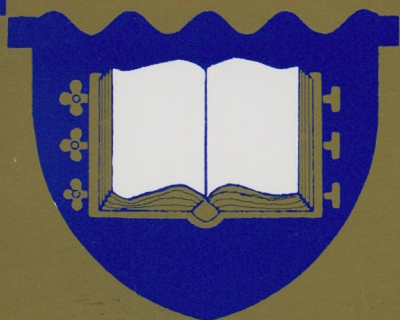
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Labour migration and the trade unions in Western Europe

Abstract

Industrialisation and economic development have always led to labour migration. The initial form is rural-urban migration, but where labour demand outstrips the availability of local workers, this is often followed by international movements. The European industrial revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries were marked by such migrations: from Ireland to Britain, from Poland to Germany, from Italy to France and Switzerland. Between 1850 and 1914 the economic development of the USA led to enormous migrations from Europe. From the 1920s to the 1960s, workers for the North, Middle-West and West were provided by the 'Great Migration' of black people from the former slave states of the South. Migration has always been a major concern for the trade union movement, presenting both problems and new impulses. In the USA the employers' use of successive waves of new immigrants as cheap labour and strike-breakers proved a serious threat.



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UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

Labour Migration
and the Trade
Unions in Western
Europe By
Stephen Castles

Occasional Paper No. 18

**LABOUR MIGRATION AND THE TRADE UNIONS IN
WESTERN EUROPE**

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LABOUR MIGRATION AND THE TRADE UNIONS IN WESTERN EUROPE

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1. Introduction

Industrialisation and economic development have always led to labour migration. The initial form is rural-urban migration, but where labour demand outstrips the availability of local workers, this is often followed by international movements. The European industrial revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries were marked by such migrations: from Ireland to Britain, from Poland to Germany, from Italy to France and Switzerland. Between 1850 and 1914 the economic development of the USA led to enormous migrations from Europe. From the 1920s to the 1960s, workers for the North, Middle-West and West were provided by the 'Great Migration' of black people from the former slave states of the South. Migration has always been a major concern for the trade union movement, presenting both problems and new impulses. In the USA the employers' use of successive waves of new immigrants as cheap labour and strike-breakers proved a serious threat.

In the economic boom after 1945 labour migration took on even greater significance. Workers came from Southern Europe, Turkey and North Africa to Western Europe; from Europe, Latin America and Asia to the USA and Canada; from Europe to Australia. In the period of economic restructuring in the 1970s and 1980s, some of the movements have declined (migration to Western Europe, European migration to North America and Australia), others have expanded (Asian and Latin American movements to North America, Asian migration to Australia) and new currents have developed (from Arab countries, Southern Asia and the Philippines into the oil states of the Persian Gulf; refugee movements from the Third World to all developed countries; and from North Africa into former emigration countries like Italy, Spain and Greece).

In all this, Japan appears to have been an exception. Apart from recruitment of Korean workers during the Second World War, internal labour reserves have been sufficient to sustain the long economic boom. The current growth in labour migration indicates that the situation is changing: like other successful industrial nations, Japan now needs migrant workers from other countries. This presents both problems and opportunities, for Japanese society as a whole as well as for the trade union movement. By looking at the European experience, Japan may be able to avoid some of the mistakes made there.

2. From Foreign Workers to Settlers

Before looking at the policies of Western European trade unions, it is necessary to briefly describe the migratory process itself (for fuller accounts see Castles and Kosack

1973, Castles 1984, Castles 1986). Western Europe today has a total immigrant population of around 16 million people, mainly as a result of labour migration between 1945 and 1974. Although entry of workers virtually ceased with the recession of the early 1970s, family reunion has continued, leading to stable settler populations. Today, most Western European countries have ethnic minorities which make up 5 - 10 per cent of their populations and workforces. The three largest Western European countries - Britain, France and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) each have about 4 million immigrants, of whom 40 - 50 per cent are of non-European origin.

How did this situation come about? In 1945, several W. European countries had severe labour shortages. Britain recruited 'European Voluntary Workers' in the refugee camps and in Italy, France set up a National Immigration Office to bring in workers from Southern Europe, Belgium recruited Italian workers for its coal and steel industry. As the postwar boom developed in the 1950s and 1960s, national workers were able to achieve upward mobility into skilled, supervisory and white-collar jobs. Sectoral labour shortages began to threaten industrial growth and led to wage inflation. Employers therefore called for import of labour, and governments took steps to encourage labour migration.

Mass labour migration took two main forms. Firstly, colonial powers encouraged movement of workers from their previous or existing colonies: from the West Indies and the Indian Sub-continent to Britain; from Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and West Africa to France; from Indonesia, Surinam and the Antilles to the Netherlands. Such workers often had the citizenship of the colonial country, and the right to entry and residence. They were usually ethnically distinct from the receiving populations, not only with regard to culture, but also physical appearance.

Secondly, other Western European countries recruited foreign workers (who came to be called 'guestworkers'), from Southern Europe, North Africa and Turkey¹. In some cases (e.g. Switzerland and Sweden) foreign workers were recruited by employers; in others (especially the FRG) highly-sophisticated systems were established to select workers in their countries of origin, to check skills, health and police records, and to transport workers to the new place of work. In addition, illegal worker movements developed, particularly where government recruitment systems did not function efficiently (France). The foreign workers were usually recruited on a fixed-term contract of one to three years, and were expected to leave if their labour was no longer required

¹ France and the Netherlands had both colonial workers and foreign workers. Britain drew in workers from former colonies and from Ireland, as well as a smaller number of foreign workers.

(e.g. in the event of a recession). They were employed mainly in unskilled jobs and housed in dormitories on building sites or near the factories. They were not meant to bring in family members or settle permanently. Generally they were entitled to medical care and some social benefits, but they were excluded from certain political or civil rights. Foreign workers generally had the right to join trade unions, but in some cases (e.g. France) were not entitled to hold union offices (see Hammar 1985 for a summary of the legal situation).

Both the colonial workers and the foreign workers turned into permanent ethnic minorities. For the former group, this does not appear surprising, but for the foreign workers, settlement contradicted the original aims of employers and governments, and indeed the wishes of the migrants themselves. It is important to understand why 'guestworkers' turned into settlers. The causes lie partly in the dynamics of Western European labour markets and partly in the structure of the migratory process.

As the economies grew, and local workers moved out of unskilled jobs, migrant labour became a structural necessity for many industries. Rapid growth through capital-widening and the development of mass production led to a constant demand for low-skilled labour. Employers found it increasingly hard to get workers, as Southern European labour reserves were used up. In addition, they did not want a constantly-fluctuating labour force, since this caused extra costs for basic training and recruitment. Employers therefore tried to retain reliable foreign workers, and offered them better conditions. At the same time, the governments allowed longer stay and family reunion.

The foreign workers, for their part, found that their original perspective of returning home with enough capital to improve their farms or start a business after a few years was unrealistic. Increasingly, they brought in their spouses and children, or started new families in the country of employment. Once their children started going to school in the new country, return became much more difficult.

The guestworker system finally collapsed in the early 1970s. When most countries stopped entry of workers, there was an expectation that immigrant workforces and populations would rapidly decline. Many foreign workers did leave, in the face of declining job opportunities. But most stayed, and they brought in their families and settled permanently. Those who left were generally from the more developed countries of origin, where job opportunities were better. Those who stayed were often from Third World countries. At the same time, refugee movements from non-European countries increased the minority population. Although such movements are not

primarily economic, the refugees do join the labour force, and need housing and services just like other migrants.

By the end of the 1970s, immigrant populations had stabilised at their present levels. The lesson is obvious: labour migration is simply the first stage of a complex migratory process, which almost inevitably leads to permanent settlement. For a democratic state, which cannot resort to brutal measures of mass expulsion, this process is irreversible. In other words: don't start mass recruitment of foreign labour unless you are willing to plan for the consequences of permanent settlement.

3. Effects of Migration and Settlement

3.1 Economic Effects

There has been much debate among economists on the economic costs and benefits of labour migration, which cannot be summarised here. I note that in Japan discussion has focussed on the possible negative effects on rationalisation and technological progress. In my view, this concern is misplaced. Migration in Western Europe appears to have favoured both total growth and improvements in productivity. The dynamic effect of an increasing labour force and population on total growth is fairly obvious. With regard to productivity, growth made possible by employing foreign workers helped provide capital for new investments. The new plant embodied technical progress and was more productive than older factories (for a detailed discussion see Castles and Kosack 1973, Chapter 9). The best evidence for this hypothesis is to be found by comparing long-term growth in countries which had a large labour force increase through immigration with countries which did not. The much better economic performance of the FRG and Switzerland compared with Britain illustrates my point.

For the trade unions, it is important to realise that while wages for unskilled work are likely to be held back by use of foreign labour, the long-term effect on wages through economic growth is likely to be positive. However, in Western Europe, the countries which made most efficient use of foreign labour before 1973 have also been at the forefront of industrial restructuring and export of capital to low-wage countries since. The effects of this for workers and unions need careful examination.

3.2 Social Effects

The social effects of immigration and settlement have been problematic, because governments did not foresee developments or plan effectively. As foreign workers moved out of company dormitories to find family dwellings, they were exposed to a

housing shortage and an unregulated and often discriminatory private market. Migrants had to accept low-quality housing in inner-city areas, lacking educational and social facilities. Better-off local people moved out to the suburbs, so that partially segregated areas developed, shared by immigrants and marginalised groups of the national populations. Throughout Western Europe, the central cities have become areas of great ethnic diversity. Such areas are, on the one hand, breeding grounds for social problems and racism. On the other hand, they provide the opportunity for the growth of ethnic communities with their own institutions, such as churches, shops, restaurants, cultural and political associations. Paradoxically, the inner-cities of Western Europe provide both the potential for racism and conflict, and the basis for a new, dynamic multicultural society.

3.3 Cultural Effects

The countries of Western Europe have to face up to increasing cultural and linguistic diversity. Turkish is now the second language of Germany, and Arabic of France. Islam is the second religion of these countries. Policies of assimilation of the new minorities have failed: they maintain their cultural and linguistic diversity and will do so for several generations. The schools were not equipped to deal with cultural and linguistic diversity. Since children of migrants were concentrated in certain schools, these often became educational ghettos, offering poor standards of learning. Health and social services were not prepared for the different needs of new immigrant groups, and were often inadequate.

It must be added that there is increasing realisation of the irreversible nature of immigration within Western European countries. Important social groups within the parties, the trade unions and the churches have come to see a multicultural society as inevitable. They have also come to see that such a society is a great step forward from the narrow national cultures of the past, and that it will in the long run benefit everybody.

3.4 Political Effects

In a situation of rapid economic and social change, many local people felt threatened and insecure. Immigrants often became the scapegoats for the deterioration of living standards. The result was the growth of extreme-right parties, violence against minorities and - in some cases - riots by minority youth. The new extreme right, such as the Front National in France and the Republikaner in the FRG have been able to build a strong racist movement, by constructing the idea of a threat to the nation posed by ethnic diversity. The rise of the extreme right in some W. European countries, most

notably in Britain, France and the FRG is now a threat to the democratic system and - above all - to the trade union movement.

Western European nation-states were built on the myth of ethnic and cultural homogeneity. The struggles for the establishment of national languages and cultures and for the unity of the nation-state have dominated European politics until recently, playing a major role in the two World Wars. The principle for defining the nation has been a concept of citizenship related to membership of the same ethnic collectivity. The development of the new ethnic minorities puts this concept in jeopardy. Immigrants have been excluded from citizenship, and find it very hard to obtain it in some countries. This means a division of society, but above all, a division of the working class, with a large section disenfranchised.

4. Trade Union Policies

4.1 The Dilemma of the Unions

Labour migration has presented serious problems to the Western European trade union movement. With regard to the basic task of the unions - representing the interests of workers at the workplace - potential interest conflicts arise. New migrants are interested in earning a lot quickly to return home, or to bring over dependents. They may do a lot of overtime, and work very fast when on piece rates. Migrants from some countries lack industrial and trade union experience, and may be used by employers to divide the labour force. Language difficulties and cultural differences may hinder communication at the workplace, making the task of trade union organisation difficult. Racism in post-colonial societies has further deepened the split in the working class. In the wider political task of trade unions - as democratic organisations speaking for workers in economic, social and political debates - immigration has also posed problems. Since immigration has been a major factor in the changes in living conditions, and has been used as a lever for political mobilisation by right-wing parties, the unions have had to take positions on these issues too.

The Western European unions found themselves in a dilemma. In view of the potential problems, it seemed logical to some to oppose immigration. But once there were migrant workers in the country, it was essential to organise them, to prevent divisions in the workforce. If unions opposed immigration, they were likely to find that migrants did not trust them and were unwilling to join. In such cases, the unions had the worst of both worlds: not strong enough to prevent immigration, their efforts to do so only served to alienate the new workers from them. Thus there was a potential conflict

between trade union policies towards immigration on the one hand and policies towards migrant workers once they were in the country, on the other. One union response to this dilemma was to insist on the principle of equal pay for equal work. Apart from this, policies have varied considerably, and need to be looked at country by country.

4.2 The Federal Republic of Germany

In the FRG about 8 million workers are organised in the 17 industrial unions linked to in the DGB (Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund - German Trade Union Federation). When recruitment of foreign workers started in the 1950s, the DGB expressed concern about the effects on employment and wages, but agreed to labour migration, once state and employers accepted three conditions: equal pay for equal work according to collective agreements, provision of initial accommodation by employers, and a monopoly on recruitment abroad by the Federal Labour Office.

In the boom years of the 1960s and early 1970s, the DGB and its member unions went along with government labour migration policies, whichever party was in power. This means that they acquiesced in a system of foreign worker recruitment, in which migrants were treated as second-class people, without political rights or the entitlement to permanent residence. Moreover, the unions did nothing to prevent the development of segmented labour markets, in which migrants got unskilled jobs, while many local workers achieved upward social mobility. The acceptance of such developments was mainly due to the belief that migration was essential for economic growth and international competitiveness, and would therefore benefit all workers in the long run.

However, from the outset, the German unions were active in setting up special advice services to help foreign workers with their problems. Many unions published leaflets and newspapers and provided training courses in the languages of the migrants. There is no doubt that the unions did address the special situation of foreign workers and welcome them as members. Membership rates for foreign workers are comparable with those for German workers. Many migrants have become shop stewards, or been elected to worker representative bodies, such as works councils.

Nonetheless, some studies indicate a local level of active participation: many foreign workers seem to feel that the unions and the works councils are really controlled by German workers, and mainly represent their interests. Such feeling are particularly strong among foreign women workers (Bundesminister für Arbeit- und Sozialordnung 1981: 213-22). This reflects a general problem of the trade union movement, which for

historical reasons is dominated by white, male, skilled workers, and is therefore becoming unrepresentative of certain groups as the labour force changes.

The real test for union policies comes not in boom conditions but in situations of unemployment and industrial conflict. Foreign workers took a major part in the spontaneous strike movement 1973. Migrants often led the struggles, which arose from the demands of unskilled and semi-skilled workers. The largest single strike was at the huge Ford works in Cologne, where the leadership was mainly in the hands of Turkish production-line workers. This strike was broken by employers and the police with the active cooperation of German union leaders and works councillors, causing a great deal of bitterness and anti-union feeling among foreign workers (Castles and Kosack 1974, Hildebrandt and Olle 1975). However, international solidarity was achieved in some factories, leading to remarkable successes, most notably at the Pierburg motor components works, where foreign semi-skilled women managed to secure the support of German male skilled workers and won substantial pay rises.

The militance of foreign workers was an underlying cause of the German Government's decision to stop the entry of foreign workers in 1973. The DGB supported the ban, mainly to protect the jobs of the existing labour force, but perhaps also because of fears of losing control of foreign workers. Some of these felt after the 1973 strikes that the German unions were not representing them adequately, and discussed establishing their own unions. In the recession of the mid-1970s, some union officials called for dismissal of foreign workers, to protect the jobs of Germans (Budzinski 1979: 55-62). But the unions did not officially support this policy, though they did go along with government regulations which gave Germans preference in hiring policies. In fact, many foreign workers were displaced from industrial employment, and in some cases they were replaced by Germans. In the early 1980s, the DGB supported measures of the SPD-FDP government restricting access of foreign workers' children to the labour market, and limiting family reunion.

After 1982, when the conservative CDU (Christian Democratic Union) came to power, with a platform calling for severe restrictions on the rights of foreign workers and their families, the DGB changed its approach. It formed an informal coalition with the churches and other social forces, calling for a policy of integration and improved rights for migrants. Industrial struggles in this period were aimed at stopping plant closures and mass redundancies, and the unions emphasised the importance of international solidarity. The campaign of the Metalworkers Union for the 35-hour working week in 1984 led to a large-scale mobilisation of both German and foreign workers. The aim of

preventing unemployment by dividing up the available work between all workers was designed to unite the labour force and combat racism.

4.3 France

In France there are three main trade union federations: the communist-led CGT, the CFDT, which has emerged out of the Christian trade union movement, and the relatively small social-democratic FO. When the National Immigration Office was set up in 1945, both the left-wing and Christian trade union federations supported the policy. But after the break-up of the post-war coalition in 1947, the main unions usually opposed labour migration. It was thought that the presence of foreign workers was being used to weaken the unions and make French workers accept lower wages and conditions. In addition, there was considerable hostility towards immigrants on the part of French workers at the shop-floor level (Verbunt 1985).

Despite their ideological divergencies, the three major trade union federations all made increasing efforts to integrate foreign workers in their organisations in the 1960s and 1970s. All recognised the inevitability of immigration and supported the entry of workers' families. All wanted more state control of entries, through bodies on which the trade unions were represented. All the unions realised that it was important to take account of migrants' special needs and to provide special services to them. The unions set up foreign worker commissions, to advise the leaderships. In areas where there were large concentrations of foreign workers, 'language groups' (i.e. special sections for foreign workers) were set up. The unions also provided advice services and interpreters, and published foreign language newspapers. However, the organisational structure of French unions at the plant level is often weak, and there is considerable evidence that attempts to achieve unity were having little impact in the factories. Conflicts between foreign and French workers became frequent (see Gani 1972) and the danger of a divided working class was very real.

In the 1970s, there was an increasing politicisation of the situation of immigrant workers, both because of political action by the immigrants themselves, and because of public awareness of the political significance of the new ethnic minorities. Immigrant workers went on strike against discrimination and exploitation at work, carried out hunger strikes to protest against police harassment and deportations, and organised rent strikes against bad conditions in migrant hostels (Withol de Wenden 1987). In many cases, the trade unions gave active support to migrants involved in such conflicts.

The Socialist Government elected in 1981 set up a Ministry for National Solidarity and offered an amnesty to the large number of illegal foreign workers. Measures were taken to improve the social conditions of migrants, to prevent police harassment, and to stop the use of deportation as a means of disciplining workers. The unions therefore shifted towards acceptance of official immigration policies. However, the period since 1981 has also been marked by the rise of a strong racist extreme-right movement - Le Pen's Front National - and by increasing racial violence. A further significant factor has been the political emergence of movements of the second generation, who find themselves victims of racism, despite education in France and - sometimes - possession of French citizenship.

There have been major industrial conflicts involving immigrant workers in the 1980s, particularly in the large car factories. These conflicts have led to movements of a new type, in which the basic demand has been for basic human dignity, and in which religion (particularly Islam) and culture have had a major mobilising role (Withol de Wenden 1987: 159 - 214). This presents a new challenge for the trade unions, who have to re-examine their organisational forms, and the relationship between ideology and the representation of worker interests.

4.4 Britain

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) and its member unions have had varying policies towards different groups of migrant workers. Irish workers have been treated in exactly the same way as local workers. The 'European Voluntary Workers' recruited in the immediate postwar years, were met with great suspicion. The unions insisted on collective agreements to restrict their employment and to ensure primacy for British workers in hiring and promotion. I will now look in more detail at policies towards the major immigrant group - black workers from the Commonwealth (sources: Miles and Phizacklea 1980; Ramdin 1987; Castles and Kosack 1973: 138-145).

In the early 1950s, trade unionists were concerned about the effect of Commonwealth immigration on employment and conditions. In 1955, the TUC discussed the issue, and re-affirmed the right of Commonwealth citizens to come and work in Britain. However, migration was blamed on colonial exploitation, and steps to eliminate the need for migration by improving conditions in the countries of origin were demanded. The TUC opposed the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, which restricted entries, but after 1965 adopted a more restrictive line on immigration, following changes in Labour Party policy.

The TUC and its member unions have consistently opposed any form of discrimination against black workers, but until the mid-1970s this opposition was purely verbal: the TUC took no practical measures to fight discrimination, nor to address migrant workers' special problems. There were no special advice centres or newspapers for immigrants, nor any monitoring of their membership levels.² The attitude was that any such measure would constitute 'inverse discrimination', and that the safest policy was one of laissez-faire. The unions were even unwilling to accept anti-discrimination laws proposed by the government in the late 1960s.

Yet there was considerable racial conflict within the working class: employers were deliberately playing off one group against another at work, working men's clubs introduced colour bars, white busmen went on strike to prevent the employment of Sikhs, many groups of workers passed anti-immigration resolutions, and dockworkers demonstrated in support of the racist outbursts of the Conservative demagogue, Enoch Powell. The laissez-faire policy of the British unions proved a failure: it did nothing to combat the rising tide of racism, in a society which was shaken by the effects of economic restructuring, industrial decline and the decay of old industrial cities. Race became an increasingly important theme in British politics.

It was only in the mid-1970s, when the extreme-right National Front was becoming an obvious threat to the trade union movement, that the TUC reorganised itself to actively combat racism and address itself to issues of 'race relations'. Yet the unions have focussed more on the threat of organised racism than on the disadvantages suffered by black and migrant workers. They have not realised that it is the division of the workers at the place of work which is the main root of racial conflict, and have done little to support groups of migrant workers who have taken action against the specific forms of exploitation they suffer. Major strikes, such as that at Mansfield Hosiery and Imperial Typewriters in the 1970s were initiated by black workers who were complaining about discrimination by white workers and trade union officials, as well as by employers. The long-drawn out and bitter strike by Asian women workers at Grunwicks Film Processing Laboratories in 1976 did gain the active support of large sections of the labour movement, but the two-year struggle ended in defeat for the workers. They felt that they had ultimately been betrayed by the trade union bureaucracy.

The TUC and its member unions have changed their policies in recent years, to address the danger of racism for the labour movement. Yet the previous policy of laissez-faire

² Despite this lack of measures at the national level, some local union branches did make special efforts to recruit immigrants, and to take account of their specific situation.

inadvertently helped permit the rise of white racism within the British working class. Even now, the unions have done little to deal with the causes of divisions among workers at the workplace level. Many black workers have found it necessary to set up their own bodies, such as the Indian Workers Association, or the Black Workers Movement. However, such organisations have not tried to become alternative trade unions, seeing that this would lead to even greater divisions. Rather they have acted as pressure groups, to force the union leaderships to take account of the situation of black workers.

4.5 Switzerland

Swiss union policy is worth mentioning briefly, as an example of the consequences of union opposition to immigration (source: Castles and Kosack 1973: 145-52). Switzerland is a small nation, which has relied very heavily on foreign labour: foreigners make up about 14 per cent of the population and 23 per cent of the labour force. Indeed, Swiss workers have moved out of manual employment to such an extent that nearly half of all factory workers are immigrants. The unions organised in the SGB (Swiss Trade Union Federation) have taken a leading role in the campaign against immigration since the mid-1950s. The SGB has supported not only measures for restricting entries, but also policies designed to reduce the number of foreign workers and residents in the countries.

The unions' opposition to immigration has been motivated by several factors: fears of the effects on wages and employment for Swiss workers, problems in organising foreigners at the workplace, and economic arguments on productivity and inflation. But the main reason put forward is fear of 'Überfremdung' - that is foreign domination - of Swiss society. The unions are afraid that large-scale immigration will change the character of Swiss life and threaten its institutions. The unions have found themselves keeping peculiar company. Both the aims of their policies and the justifications advanced for them have come close to those of extreme-right nationalist groups, which have initiated referenda calling for the deportation of large proportions of the immigrant population.

At the same time, the Swiss unions have tried hard to get foreign workers to become members, using methods like those of the French and German unions: foreign language newspapers, recruiting drives with foreign-language leaflets, special advice centres. Obviously, such measures are essential: foreign workers are numerous in all economic sectors, and even form a majority in some (building, catering, textiles and clothing). If the unions cannot get the foreign workers to join, their viability is in doubt.

The research I carried out in the early 1970s indicated that the participation of foreign workers in the Swiss unions was low. Few were willing to join organisations, which they saw as opposed to their presence in the country. Moreover, there were few foreign trade union officials, so that many migrants saw the unions as Swiss organisations, which were not sensitive to their special situation. Many migrants had experienced hostility and racism from Swiss people, both at work and elsewhere. Conflicts between Swiss and foreign workers took place within the union too. Many foreigners perceived the unions as just another part of the discriminatory system of employment to which they were subjected.

5. Conclusions

My brief summary of trade union policies towards immigrants in four countries cannot do justice to the complex problems and the solutions sought by the labour movement. It would also be important to look at other countries. The Swedish trade unions, for instance, have played a pioneering role in demanding the provision of language instruction in the workplace. They have also paid special attention to the health and safety needs of migrant workers. In Australia large-scale immigration has led to a multicultural workforce, and the unions have had to recognise that this requires considerable changes in their organisational structures and demands (Lever-Tracy and Quinlan 1988). There are many examples, but there is no time for further detail here.

In summary, it is clear that the policies of Western European trade unions have varied considerably. The unions of the FRG have accepted labour migration, and have made fairly successful efforts to integrate foreign workers into the unions. Nonetheless, there have been conflicts and differences of interest between foreign and German workers. The unions have been slow in recognising the reality of permanent settlement but have now accepted their responsibility for working for the improvement of the civic and political rights of immigrants. The French unions opposed immigration for many years, but tried to bring foreign workers into the unions. They also supported struggles against discrimination and racism, but have not always been effective in combating hostility towards foreigners among French workers. The British unions have opposed discrimination in principle, but have been very tardy in taking practical measures to combat it. Their laissez-faire policy has allowed racism to become a major political factor in Britain. The Swiss unions have opposed immigration, and their policies of reducing the foreign population have deepened the division in the labour force.

Despite the efforts of trade unionists in many countries, very serious problems remain: many migrant workers are still concentrated in unskilled and undesirable jobs, excluded from political participation, denied security of residence and socially disadvantaged. It is essential for the trade unions to take measures to address the needs of migrant workers, and to integrate them into the labour movement. The development of an ethnically segmented labour force over the last 30 years means that any attempt to achieve working-class unity must today take account of migrant workers' own forms of political organisation and leadership. Failure to respond to this challenge can perpetuate the division of the labour force, and encourage the growth of racism and the rise of the extreme right.

6. Significance for Japan

The huge migrations of the last 45 years are merely the prelude to even greater shifts in populations. The increasing integration of the world economy, the deepening North-South divide and the improvements in communications all encourage migration. Countries like Japan cannot avoid being affected by such trends. What I have read about labour migration to Japan reminds me in many ways of the situation in Western Europe in the early 1960s, when migration was getting under way. At that time, governments and social groups were faced with choices: about the character of labour migration, about the future of their economies, and about the type of society they wanted. On the whole, the opportunities were wasted and the nature of the problems was not understood. It was not so much that wrong decisions were made. Rather, no choices were made at all. Instead of planning immigration with regard for long-term economic, social and political consequences, short-term labour market policies were pursued. The result was that immigration has led to very serious problems.

The world economic situation has changed since then. Moreover, Japan is different in many ways from the Western European countries in the 1960s. Nonetheless, I hope that Japanese planners will take notice of this history, and make wise decisions, based both on the experience of other countries, and on the special circumstances of their own country. Clearly, the trade unions, as representatives of the working people of the country, have a special responsibility. Decisions about immigration policy affect not only wages and working conditions, but also the situation in the cities, the cultural climate, political and human rights, and the character of the nation state.

What emerges clearly from a study of the Western European experience is that labour migration is an irreversible process, which leads to family reunion, settlement, and the

development of an ethnically diverse society. Where policies of assimilation have been tried, they have failed. Immigrants remain culturally distinct over generations, and form their own communities. Ethnically-diverse countries can either become divided societies, marked by racism, discrimination and exploitation of minorities; or multicultural societies based on equal rights for all and the acceptance of cultural pluralism. The trade unions have a great responsibility in this matter. They can help to ensure that the long-term consequences of labour migration are understood, and that appropriate planning is carried out in advance. They can help to safeguard the human right of migrants, and to make sure that they obtain equal treatment with regard to employment and social services. The unions must realise that insisting on equal rights for immigrant workers is the best way of safeguarding the interests of the local labour force, which they represent.

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